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ABSTRACT

Asserts that leaders, especially Chief Executive Officers, are called as stewards to lead their colleges to wrestle thoughtfully with the issues of the future, to reach consensus wherever possible on the tough choices they may face, and to give voice to the authentic vision of the college community. If community colleges are to sustain the servant ethic that inspires their best work, servant leaders who consistently articulate an authentic, mission-driven vision for the college must lead them. Trust is the bedrock of effective leadership and a healthy organizational climate. For a community college leader, this means fashioning organizations that are open, leadership teams that are non-defensive, decision-making processes that genuinely share responsibility, and habits of listening and serving at every level of the organization. Change and continuity should always be linked. Strategic thinking and planning at every level of the college is the best tool for mastering change. Another area in which the CEO has particular leadership responsibility is in connecting the college to the larger community. For this reason, the CEO requires particular skills in communication, persuasion, diplomacy, and public advocacy. Addresses a few of the more significant issues and challenges that are likely to attend nearly all of the colleges in our movement: effective learning, technology, resource development, students, "selling" learning, and governance. (VWC)

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A Brief Philosophy of Community College Leadership

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Vision and Mission

I have heard it said that followers could forgive almost anything in a leader except a lack of vision. If this is true, it must signal a deep recognition in our organizations that foresight, stewardship of our future, is the essential function of leadership. This is not to say that the leader is called to impose a purely personal vision on the community. It is sad that the call to vision has served as a rationale for many an egocentric leader. Rather, leaders, especially Chief Executive Officers, are called as stewards to lead their colleges to wrestle thoughtfully with the issues of the future, to reach consensus wherever possible on the tough choices we may face, and to give voice to the authentic vision of the college community.

There are dangers here equal to those of lethargy in leadership. A twisted view of institutional leadership persists in our culture, perhaps because of its legitimate literary source (Emerson), that a great institution is the "lengthened shadow" of its president. We can give thanks that this is NOT the case. In fact, I know a number of rather fine institutions that have thrived in spite of perverse leadership. Robert Greenleaf used better language. He claimed that authentic servant leaders possess *entheos*, meaning a sense of sustaining spirit. Rather than the institution being identified with the ego of the leader, the leader is deeply identified with the servant mission and values of the institution.

If community colleges are to sustain the servant ethic that inspires our best work, servant leaders who consistently articulate an authentic, mission-driven vision for the college must lead them. Much in the traditional mission of the colleges remains valid and true to the spirit of servanthood. The open door, learner centered, comprehensive colleges created in the past half-century are still ingenious and desperately needed institutions. How these colleges can thrive amid staggering changes in the communities we serve, the emerging technological milieu, and

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learners who are vastly different from those of only a few years ago, is the question that inhabits all of our work of creating a shared vision.

Organizational Climate

Trust is the bedrock of effective leadership and a healthy organizational climate. Few disagree with this axiom. Equally few understand that the real challenge is not to find followers who will trust their leaders, but leaders who are courageous enough to trust the followers. Stated another way, trust is one of those paradoxical qualities that only grows when it is given away. For a community college leader, this means fashioning organizations that are open, leadership teams that are non-defensive, decision making processes that genuinely share responsibility, and habits of listening and serving at every level of the organization. Old models of control, hierarchy, benevolent autocracy, and paternal (even patriarchal) leadership can never achieve this kind of mature trust. Further, an open environment places a premium on widely shared, timely and valuable information on all of our work. The quality and pervasiveness of our use of information enables leaders throughout the organization to move from control behaviors to new approaches to shared accountability. It also permits the whole college community to participate in naming and solving problems.

Change and Continuity

These two words should always be linked. The degree to which most of us can embrace change depends in large measure on our confidence that things of enduring value will continue. I can and have embraced stunning new uses of technology in teaching and learning, for example, only when I am persuaded that they can enhance our mission and not just our position in the marketplace. As colleges, we face powerful currents of change in several areas. In technology, both for ordinary business processes and for learning, there are tremendous opportunities to be seized. In my current role, I have helped to take a college from being more than a decade behind the technological curve to very close to the "bleeding edge." This has required new approaches to financing, staffing, professional development, technical support, communication, campus development, and instruction. It also requires a constant dialog on the core values of the college,

the anxieties that this change can foment, and the reaffirmation of the people whom the technology is meant to serve, faculty, staff and students.

The CEO bears a special responsibility to help the college to address issues of change and continuity. Strategic thinking and planning at every level of the college is our best tool for mastering change. Strategic approaches establish major themes and solid goals for the whole organization and a measure of stability and predictability that enables leaders throughout the college to take risks and safely experience both breakthroughs and interesting failures.

A college system that practices strategic thinking is able to decentralize much of its initiative. This is a powerful transition, perhaps even a transformation. I have heard staff describe it by contrasting two metaphors. The old model of organization they liken to a railroad. The tracks are all laid out and it is the responsibility of the central administration to make the trains run on time. The new model is air traffic control. The folks in the "control tower" actually don't control very much because they aren't flying a single plane. The pilots fly. The work of leadership is more like partnering to reduce risk and increase effectiveness. To be sure, there are still important issues of accountability and the senior leaders are still called to be decisive and assume liability for getting results. The work, though, is much more widely shared and the potential for accomplishment is multiplied accordingly.

Community Leadership

Another area in which the CEO has particular leadership responsibility is in connecting the college to the larger community. Colleges are organizations that tend to behave collectively a bit like organisms. They tend, therefore, to self-absorption. The senior leaders bear a special responsibility to assure that this doesn't happen by actively connecting the college to the whole community it is intended to serve. This activity is especially important in economic and workforce development, resource development, connecting to other sectors of the educational system, and political advocacy for the interests of the college and its mission. For this reason, the CEO requires particular skills in communication, persuasion, diplomacy, and public advocacy.

Areas of Focus

Every college district has its unique blend of challenges and issues to address. A new chancellor needs to listen thoughtfully and deeply to the community both inside and outside the college to gain an authentic understanding of these. There are some issues, however, that are likely to attend nearly all of the colleges in our movement. I mention only a few of the more significant issues below:

- Effective Learning – Throughout the community college movement, educators are recognizing the crisis in student learning. It is seen in boldest relief in measures of student success in key foundational courses. A typical freshman composition class, for example, is likely to demonstrate a very stable rate of student success in the neighborhood of 50%. I believe these results are not sustainable. Unless we are able to develop learning systems that regularly lead to success rates approaching 80%, our colleges will lose the public trust, our enrollments will suffer (especially at the sophomore level), and we will face extreme pressure to lower standards. This is a losing strategy. There are promising examples, however, of colleges where this tide has been turned.
- Technology – Digital technology is transforming the way we communicate, do our work, solve problems, and gauge success. Traditional college systems fail to provide the resources to achieve sustain the systems required to keep current. They also fail to provide the levels of support (technical development, time, professional support, software, etc.) required to realize the benefits of these investments. Both closing the gap and sustaining a position of currency should be on the chancellor's priorities.
- Resource Development – Few colleges are funded adequately to achieve a margin of excellence. Traditional sources of revenue have to be augmented by aggressive development efforts. This necessarily involves the entire organization, but places a special requirement on the chancellor to lead and represent the college system effectively with prospective partners.
- Students – I suppose that educators have in every age believed that their students just weren't up to the standards of those they used to teach. I am certain, however, that we are witnessing a "tectonic" change in our students. It is not related to socio-economics,

demography, ethnicity or any other easy handle. It seems to me to be a pervasive cultural change related, perhaps, to this being the first truly "post-modern" class of students. It effects their notions of truth and authority, their trust of institutions, their goals in life and sense of well being. We owe it to our stewardship of the learning community to explore these trends and issues deeply.

- "Selling" Learning - Our colleges face persistent and sometimes pernicious pressures from the marketplace to succumb to the "commoditization" of learning. Increasingly, both our students and our other publics treat our colleges like retail businesses selling courses to a consuming public. While there may be a thread of value in this view for addressing the arrogance of bureaucracy, the damage of such a view far outweighs the value. Our students are much more than customers and they bear a responsibility that no mere consumer must assume. Our institutional responses to this trend must be thoughtful, introspective, and balanced.
- Governance – I have a deep commitment to shared governance and, I believe, as very strong record in this area. The faculty and staff of a college should have legitimate opportunities to be much more than constituents or interest groups. They have to be treated as co-owners of the enterprise. In a multi-campus district like Valencia, the issues of governance often take on dimensions of strain among the colleges and between the district office and the colleges that are unhealthy. There is great strength to be gained from being part of a multi-college district, but also great foolishness to be avoided. The district office must constantly discipline itself to a mission of service to the colleges, avoiding habits of "palace politics" and isolation from the colleges. The chancellor establishes the pattern. Similarly, the colleges have to avoid habits of competition, jealousy, and a scarcity mentality. The question to ask whenever a conflict arises is, "How would partners handle this?" Fundamental to the health of such an organization is to decentralize all functions of the district that don't have a compelling reason to be centralized. In addition, the quality of the leadership team, particularly the health of the chancellor's relationships with the presidents and their trust in one another, establishes the pattern for the rest of the district.